



National Science Foundation
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for NSF 16-503, NSF Research Traineeship (NRT) Program

NRT TRAINEESHIP TRACK FAQs

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FAQS THAT APPLY TO BOTH TRACKS

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20. Does the limit on the number of submissions per organization apply to subawardees and non-lead organizations on collaborative proposals?
21. Can NRT projects include international partners?
22. Will we need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the evaluation activities and instruments described in our proposal?
23. Will a project that focuses on a master's only program receive lower preference than projects involving doctoral students only or both doctoral and master's students?
24. Will proposals that do not meet the eligibility requirements for submission be returned without review?

NRT TRAINEESHIP TRACK FAQS

1. What is a trainee?

A trainee is a research-based STEM graduate student (MS or PhD) who is accepted into the institution's NRT program and is expected to complete all the required program elements as described in the proposal. Trainees do not have to receive stipend and tuition support directly from the NRT award. They can be supported from a variety of sources including research assistantships, teaching assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, or other funding.

2. What is a traineeship?

A traineeship is focused on students and their technical and broader professional development. In the case of NRT, a traineeship involves a strong institutional commitment to mentoring STEM graduate students and the development of their technical and transferrable professional skills (e.g., teamwork, ethics, communications, teaching, leadership, and project management) for a variety of STEM careers. NRT includes a focus on the students' overall development as STEM professionals, in addition to their conducting cutting-edge interdisciplinary research.

3. Can international students be NRT trainees?

Yes, they can be trainees and fully participate in any NRT program elements (e.g., courses, workshops, and internships). However, NRT stipends and customary costs of education for stipend-supported trainees are restricted to U.S. citizens, nationals, and permanent residents.

4. Are all proposals expected to include funds for trainees?

No, projects in the NRT Traineeship Track may fund NRT programmatic elements only. The reverse - funding of NRT trainees only, without funding for programmatic elements - is not consistent with the goals of the NRT program.

5. How are priority areas reflected in funding decisions?

While there is no set allocation to each priority area (DESE, UtB, INFEWS), the priority areas are integral to the NRT program and NSF. The portfolio of NRT projects that is funded usually reflects the emphasis on priority areas and national priorities rather than funding strictly along pre-set allocations.

6. Can we propose research that addresses more than one priority area?

Although traineeship proposals may include research and training efforts that contribute to more than one priority area, submissions must be to a single priority area (DESE, UtB, INFEWS, or otherwise). The research area should be identified in the Project Title at the time of submission using the prefixes "NRT-DESE:", "NRT-UtB:", "NRT-INFEWS:", or "NRT:"

7. If master's and doctoral students are included in one NRT project, how much overlap in their training is expected and/or preferred?

The training approach is left up to the proposer to develop. Potentially, training specific methodologies could be suitable for both master's and doctoral students together. However, some training might be better suited for master's or doctoral students separately.

8. Does the mention of pedagogy and mentoring training for faculty members mean that the NRT will fund professional development for faculty?

An NRT proposal may include funding for faculty training.

9. Can I propose funding for the improvement of a training model that is not entirely new but is certainly not (yet) broadly adopted?

An NRT proposal may include funding to expand or improve a current training model, but the potential added value should be substantial and potentially transformative.

10. Does the fact that "Education" is not included in the "NRT" title mean that NRT will fund more proposed hands-on training and less classroom instruction?

No, training could include classroom instruction.

11. Referring to the "Key features of the Traineeship Track" (section II.A.3), are we being asked to develop evidence-based strategies to broaden participation of students from diverse backgrounds, or are we being asked to apply evidence-based strategies that are already in practice?

Proposers are encouraged to propose new strategies for broadening participation of students from diverse backgrounds that show promise of success based on available information and build upon existing evidence-based strategies.

- 12. Are there preferred types of formative assessments (section II.A.3) that we would include as central to the traineeship, or are these formative assessments open as part of the new model we are proposing?**

It is up to the proposers to identify the types of formative assessments. However, they should be formulated and designed to regularly inform and improve the NRT project.

- 13. Is there a limit on cost of education that can be charged to the grant?**

The institution can budget for customary costs of education (tuition, health insurance, and required fees) for NRT trainees while they are receiving NRT stipend support. You may offer a discounted tuition rate if this is a customary practice for federally-funded trainees, research assistants, and/or fellows at your institution and not a practice solely for the NRT trainees.

- 14. Will NRT Traineeship Track proposals with external evaluators receive more preference than proposals with internal evaluators?**

No. However, if an internal evaluator is used, the institution must provide justification and explain how lack of bias is ensured, including provision for external evaluation.

INNOVATIONS IN GRADUATE EDUCATION (IGE) TRACK FAQs

- 15. Are there disciplinary or interdisciplinary priority areas for IGE projects?**

No, priority research areas have not been set for the NRT IGE Track. Proposals are expected to describe the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or general graduate education needs addressed and their importance.

- 16. Can we propose funding for the involvement of students other than stipend support?**

Yes. Although the NRT Innovations in Graduate Education Track projects may not support graduate student stipends, salaries, compensation, or cost of education, including tuition and fees, funds may be allocated to support student involvement in the model being piloted in other ways, such as travel, subsistence, other costs of participation.

- 17. Are NRT IGE leadership teams required to include an internal or external evaluator?**

No, plans for formative and summative assessment of the approach to graduate education tested in the IGE project should be detailed in the proposal. However, internal or external evaluators are not required to be core team members or consultants on the project.

- 18. Will preference be given to IGE projects according to whether an institution already has an NSF Traineeship Track project?**

The IGE Track is a new graduate education initiative that is distinct from the Traineeship Track. Institutions may propose and carry out both types of projects, but those proposals will not be given preference and an individual may serve as PI or Co-PI on only one NRT project, irrespective of the track. An individual may serve as core personnel on multiple NRT projects.

FAQS THAT APPLY TO BOTH TRACKS

19. Can I propose an NRT project for a non-research-based Professional Master's program?

No, research is integral to the NRT program. For Traineeship proposals, non-research-based professional master's students are eligible to participate in NRT activities; however, they cannot be considered "trainees" (See #2 for a definition of "trainee") by the program and are ineligible to receive NRT stipend or cost of education support. NRT trainees must be in a research-based degree program that requires a thesis or dissertation. For IGE projects, the primary target audience for any proposed activities should be research-based master's degree and/or doctoral degree students in a STEM discipline.

20. Does the limit on the number of submissions per organization apply to subawardees and non-lead organizations on collaborative proposals?

Yes, eligible organizations may participate in only two Traineeship Track and two IGE track proposals per competition. Participation includes serving as a lead organization on a non-collaborative proposal or as a lead organization, non-lead organization, or subawardee on a collaborative proposal. However, this limitation does not apply to organizations participating solely as evaluators on projects.

21. Can NRT projects include international partners?

Yes, NRT projects in both the Traineeship Track and Innovations in Graduate Education Track may include international partners if they provide significant added value to the projects. However, international partners cannot be subawardees and funds for their participation must be drawn from non-NSF sources.

22. Will we need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the evaluation activities and instruments described in our proposal?

If your proposal is successful and awarded, you will need to provide official documentation from your institution's IRB confirming either that the planned activities involving human subjects have been approved or that your project is exempt from IRB approval.

23. Will a project that focuses on a master's only program receive lower preference than projects involving doctoral students only or both doctoral and master's students?

No, all proposals will be evaluated based on their merit. Projects involving master's students, Ph.D. students, and both master's and Ph.D. students will be evaluated equally.

24. Will proposals that do not meet the eligibility requirements for submission be returned without review?

Yes, proposals that do not comply with the solicitation will be returned without review. The eligibility conditions (IV) include who may submit proposals and serve as a PI, limits on the number of proposals per organization, and limits to number of proposals per PI or Co-PI.